

# A multidimensional approach to the measurement of effectiveness of elite sport policies. The case of Flanders

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## Aim of paper and research questions

The results of nations (e.g., number of medals, top eight places) in Olympics Games and other international sport competitions offer the most self-evident and transparent measure of success in high performance sport. They are therefore most often used by national governments and the media as an evaluation of effectiveness of elite sport policies. However, they do not take into account the long-term duration of an athletic career (on average 10 years, Ericsson, 2003), nor the many confounding variables influencing international success which cannot be fashioned by policies.

This paper seeks to apply a multidimensional approach for the measurement of effectiveness of national sport organisations/federations (Chelladurai & Haggerty, 1991; Chelladurai, 2001; Shilbury & Moore, 2006) to the setting of elite sports policy evaluation. By examining a four year cycle of elite sport policies in Flanders (the northern, Dutch speaking part of Belgium), this study endeavours to establish a dialogue on methods to evaluate elite sport policies of nations solely in terms of their results (outputs) or from a broader perspective in terms of the processes that were undertaken in a nation with regard to improving the elite sports policies and climate.

## Literature review

This study integrated two basic frameworks to measure the effectiveness of elite sport policies. The first framework determined that all sports policy factors that are commonly considered to be important for international sporting success, can be classified into nine dimensions, or “pillars”, situated at two levels: inputs (pillar 1, financial support) and throughputs (pillars 2-9), indicating the processes that may lead to a certain output (success) (De Bosscher et al., 2006).

The second framework is based on the suggestion that ‘it may be necessary to assess the effectiveness of national sport organisations from a multidimensional perspective’ (Chelladurai, 2001: 362), by integrating four models of effectiveness measurement at an elite level: a goals model (outputs) (Price, 1972); the system resource model (inputs) (Yuchtman & Seashore, 1967; Frisby, 1986); the process model (throughputs) (Steers, 1997); the multiple constituency model (feedback) (Conolly, Conlon & Deutsch, 1980). This concept was applied to the context of elite sport policies.

## Research design and data analysis

The changes in elite sport policies in Flanders during a four year period (2004-2008) were evaluated for each level of effectiveness and for each key success determinant of elite sport policies using mixed research methods. At both points of time data on the nine pillars were

collected through interviews with key agencies of elite sport policies, through secondary resources and through a comprehensive survey with elite athletes and coaches on the elite sport climate.

## Results

In spite of the considerable increasing elite sport expenditures in Flanders (which increased by 250% over four years) (inputs), and notwithstanding the increasing development of the other eight pillars (throughputs), this has not lead to the expected results (outputs) at an international level. Performances actually decreased. Still, 59% of the athletes and 67% of the coaches indicated that the elite sport climate has improved (feedback).

## Discussion and conclusion

There are several possible explanations for the missing link in improved inputs, throughputs and feedback on the one hand, and the outputs (goals) on the other hand. First, because of the passive approach to elite sport policies in the past, Flanders had to catch up in a range of key success factors, consequently enlarging the gap with other competitors who are continuing to develop their elite systems and policies.. Second, because of the length of an athletic career, it may be too early to evaluate the effects of the long-term investments in talent identification and development that Flanders has made.

Although the literature shows that a goals model may be an appropriate way to evaluate effectiveness, if clear goals can be identified and measured, -- as is the case in elite sport (Chelladurai, 2001) --, this study showed that even in elite sport, a simple evaluation of the attained goals may be too narrow. Using a multidimensional approach, the sport management literature on national sport organisations however, delivers a methodological framework that can be used for the evaluation of general elite sport policies. It would be recommended for further research to make international comparisons of this multidimensional approach to effectiveness and it would be worth exploring the extension of this method to a sport for all setting.

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